

Honorable Julius Genachowski, Chairman

Commissioner Michael J. Copps

Commissioner Robert M. McDowell

Commissioner Mignon Clyburn

Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker

Federal Communications Commission

445 Twelfth Street SW

Washington, DC 20554

Re: CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

Dear Chairman Genachowski and Commissioners Copps, McDowell, Clyburn, and Baker,

As an consumer of Sorenson Video Relay Service (VRS), I have the great fortune of teaching and assisting deaf individuals to communicate by videophone in American Sign Language using VRS as well as performing job placement activities to help my clients find jobs in the community through Sorenson VRS. Without it, it would be an undue hardship for me to perform my job as a VR Counselor for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing - in fact it would be impossible because all other means of communication such as the TDD would put me back in teh dark ages of when potential employers would hang up on me. I have seen first-hand that this life-altering broadband service is a vital link that connects deaf people to the hearing community and employers in particular.

Ensuring that deaf individuals have access to VRS and encouraging improvements in VRS should be a high priority for you as Chairman and Commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the FCC to make available to all deaf individuals nationwide ?functionally-equivalent? communications and this leads to deaf people finding

jobs in the community to become self-sufficient, becoming independent of SSI/SSDI and maintaining employment.

You will soon determine the future of VRS. When you set the VRS rate, you will determine whether America makes progress toward the statutory goals of functional equivalence, nationwide access and inclusion ? or force deaf users to revert to TTY communications which puts us back into the dark ages; it is a horrific set back for all of us. And, you will determine whether VRS fulfills its potential to drive broadband adoption by the deaf, even in the face of poverty and isolation. Deaf people are discriminated against in the job market forcing them to live on SSI/SSDI and therefore they cannot avoid such.

I was deeply disturbed to see the Commission's recent Public Notice on VRS rates. These proposals would put an end to VRS as we know it. Why? Why should we go back to being oppressed as a disability group? Why? Tell me why? I have been informed that if these proposed rates are adopted, Sorenson, a very honorable and professional company would head into bankruptcy just because of what the other dishonest companies did. This would be disastrous for deaf VRS users. This would be a penalty to Sorenson for fraud that was committed by other VRS companies.

The FCC should be increasing the availability and use of VRS, not cutting back. Look what technology is doing for hearing sighted people. They are always getting better and better quality services but no, not the deaf because we are constantly being oppressed. You should adopt a rate that encourages continuing improvements in VRS technology and continues to improve services levels just like the general public non-disabled community has access to. Recent developments in VRS are a good example of how the service can be improved, such as enhanced 911 services, 10-digit numbering, a larger and better-trained pool of interpreters and better videophones with an array of enhanced features. Monthly payments for broadband are a big expense for many deaf people, and instead of trying to cut back on VRS, you should be exploring ways to make VRS over broadband more affordable to deaf individuals.

Progress towards functional equivalence will be destroyed if the FCC does not encourage VRS providers, more specifically Sorenson, to improve VRS and make it more widely available. VRS is a recent and dramatic advancement that benefits those who are deaf, but so much more can be done. Why put a stop to that? It would be tragic if the FCC were to destroy this broadband service that is so vital to the deaf.

Recent reports of fraud in the VRS industry are disturbing to employees who work for a company that has operated within current FCC guidelines and has worked to maintain the integrity of the VRS fund. The FCC must devote more of its time and energy to focusing on the elimination of fraud as well as renew its confidence in those VRS who have not committed such fraud.

I urge you to establish a fair and predictable rate for VRS that will encourage VRS providers to invest in improving VRS and reaching more deaf individuals. The law requires it and it is the right thing to do and who in all honesty doesn't want to do the right thing for this country for people with disabilities at no fault of their own?

Sincerely,